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Letter dated 11 May 2000 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to request that the statement that South Africa would have made at the 4139th meeting of the Security Council, concerning the situation in Sierra Leone, be distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dumisani S. **Kumalo**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 11 May 2000 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Statement to the Security Council by Ambassador Dumisani S. Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa, on the situation in Sierra Leone, 11 May 2000

Once again, we meet at a critical time for the United Nations. Our Organization finds itself at a crossroads. The international community is being called upon to take a stand, to make decisions that may define, in terms of peacekeeping, the future of our organization.

We must display the collective resolve, political will and leadership required to revive the hopes for peace among the long-suffering people of Sierra Leone. As Africans, it has been difficult to watch helplessly as yet another country in our continent deteriorates right in front of our own eyes.

We join in condemning, in the strongest terms, the serious violations of the Lomé Peace Agreement by Mr. Foday Sankoh and his rebel movement known as the RUF. Mr. Foday Sankoh cannot be allowed to destroy the hopes for peace and reconciliation of the people of Sierra Leone and frustrate the will of the international community.

Mr. Sankoh has clearly demonstrated that he has no respect for the international community by detaining over 500 United Nations peacekeepers and even killing some of them. Our hearts go out to the families of the peacekeepers who gave their lives for freedom in Sierra Leone.

We call upon the RUF to abide by their obligations under the Lomé Peace Agreement. Mr. Sankoh and his rebels must immediately cease all hostilities and attacks against civilians, and must release all detained United Nations personnel. The United Nations must remain engaged in Sierra Leone until there is peace in that country.

South Africa welcomes the statement by the heads of State of the countries belonging to the Economic Community of West African States who met in Abuja on 9 May 2000. We underscore and echo their statement declaring that it is unacceptable to challenge the provisions of the Lomé Peace Agreement, and for Mr. Sankoh to attempt to take power in Sierra Leone through the use of force. We endorse calls made by the international community for concerted action to resolve the crisis caused by the reckless behaviour of the RUF. We support the tireless efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement Security Council caucus who have remained seized with this matter throughout.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has appealed for UNAMSIL to be brought up to full strength. We express our appreciation to those Governments that heeded the Secretary-General's call and offered assistance to bring about the urgent deployment of the extra troops on the ground in Sierra Leone.

We commend the contributions of troop-contributing countries to UNAMSIL. It is unfortunate that some have used unfair characterizations to attribute blame for the setbacks experienced by UNAMSIL. Now is not the time to apportion blame. None of us here could have expected that the task of maintaining peace, and setting the conditions for reconstruction and reconciliation in Sierra Leone, was going to be easy after 10 years of ongoing conflict.

This is especially true in an operation in which the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed elements into civil society is so central to the success of the entire mission.

It is important to recall this is not the first time that the United Nations and Member States, acting in support of the United Nations, have suffered setbacks of this nature. The grim events in Srebrenica, and the taking hostage of United Nations and other international personnel in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are today recognized as critical moments of failure in the history of our Organization. But none of this has been allowed to divert us from our responsibility of maintaining peace in places such as Kosovo and East Timor.

With hindsight, the unfolding situation in Sierra Leone appears to have validated the earlier concerns of SADC and ECOWAS in seeking an appropriate mandate, appropriate numbers of troops and civilian police, and for our peacekeepers to be fully backed up with the appropriate political and material support

required to do the job right. We need to ensure that we do not repeat past mistakes by doing peacekeeping on the cheap.

In conclusion, the current mandate of UNAMSIL provides the necessary authority to protect the civilians of Sierra Leone. It also makes provision for the United Nations peacekeepers to defend themselves. UNAMSIL must be given the necessary political and material support to fully implement these mandates.

If the mandate should not prove sufficient, then it will need to be strengthened. This will need to be done for the sake of the people of Sierra Leone, for the sake of our United Nations peacekeepers, and, above all, for the sake of maintaining international peace.